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## 15-YEAR-OLD INDIAN AMERICAN NAMED TIME'S 'KID OF THE YEAR'

**Gitanjali Rao is an inventor, author, and a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) promoter**

**USING TECH TO TACKLE EVERYDAY PROBLEMS**

The latest issue of Time Magazine features Gitanjali's interview by actor Angelina Jolie, in which she talks about how she uses technology to tackle issues ranging from contaminated drinking water to opioid addiction and cyberbullying. In 2017, Gitanjali, then just 12, had won the top prize in the Young Scientist Challenge for her device that finds lead in drinking water

**BAROMETER FOR RISING YOUNG LEADERS**

- For the past 92 years, TIME has named a Person of the Year
- In 2019, climate activist Greta Thunberg, then 16 years old, became the first individual under age 25 to receive the title
- This year, TIME decided to recognise its first ever Kid of the Year, a barometer for the rising leaders of America's youngest generation

**5,000**

**NOMINEES WERE IN THE RACE FOR TIME MAGAZINE'S 'KID OF THE YEAR' TITLE**

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

# 7-hr marathon talks fail to cut ice with farmers

Next meeting tomorrow; agriculture minister assures unions govt will not touch MSP

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi / Chandigarh

THE fourth round of talks between agitating farmers and the Centre which stretched for about seven hours on Thursday remained inconclusive, but the government expressed willingness to address some of the concerns raised by farmer's unions. The next round of talks will be held on Saturday.

Both sides agreed that a little progress has been made in the talks. Sources said Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar assured the farmers on the minimum support price (MSP), saying it will not be touched. "No changes will be made to it," sources quoted the minister as saying.

"Initially, we felt the deadlock will persist but slowly due to pressure from our side, the government started listening to us and then the talks went on in a conducive atmosphere. In the next meeting, we will put pressure on the government and ask them to take back the laws. It will be finalised in the Saturday's meeting," Harjinder Singh Tanda of Azaad Kisan Sangharsh Committee said.

However, the farm leaders were firm on their demand that the three new farm laws be repealed. During the meeting, the farmers gave a presentation about their concerns following which deliberations were held on each point. "The government is considering giving written assurance on the MSP," the sources said.

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Farmers' delegation coming out after a meeting with Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi on Thursday | SHEKHAR YADAV

**BADAL RETURNS PADMA AWARD OVER FARM LAWS**

Chandigarh: Akali Dal stalwart and former Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal on Thursday returned his Padma Vibhushan award in protest against the Centre's new farm laws. In a separate announcement, dissident Akali leader and Rajya Sabha member Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa also said he will return the Padma Bhushan conferred on him last year. Earlier, some former Punjab sportsmen too have threatened to return their awards | P9

## Farmers who commit suicide are cowards, says minister

PRAJNA G R @ Madikeri

At a time when massive protests by farmers over the farm laws have rocked the national capital, Karnataka Agriculture Minister B C Patil stoked a controversy when he termed farmers who commit suicide as "cowards". The minister's remarks earned him the ire of farmers as well as opposition leaders.

Speaking at the Ponnampet Forestry College in Kodagu district on Thursday, Patil narrated an incident about a woman farmer he had met, who had told him that her gold bangles were the result of hard work of 35 years in the farms. "If a woman can earn this from farming, why are farmers committing suicide? A farmer who commits suicide is a coward. Only a coward who cannot care for his wife and children commits suicide. A true farmer must not commit suicide," he said.

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LOUD AND CLEAR

# BSY will last his term, says BJP general secretary

RAMU PATIL @ Bengaluru

AMID the on-and-off talk about leadership change in the state, BJP national general secretary in charge of Karnataka, Arun Singh sought to put all speculation to rest on Thursday when he ruled out any such possibility. He even said Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa is doing excellent work for overall development of the state.

"No, there will be no change in leadership," Arun Singh told *TNIE*. This is for the first time the party's national general secretary in charge of the state has clarified on the issue, sending out a clear message, amid buzz about lack of clarity from the party central leadership.

Earlier too, a number of senior BJP leaders in Karnataka, including state president Nalin Kumar Kateel, had rubbished all such talk, stating that Yediyurappa will complete the full term in office.

"Yediyurappaji is a great leader, a mass leader. He is our CM and he is working wonderfully, taking care of every section of society," said Singh, who is visiting Karnataka to attend the party core committee and state executive committee meetings in Belagavi on Friday and Saturday. The CM and other senior leaders are also attending the meetings to discuss strategies to further strengthen the party and also review preparations for the Gram Panchayat elections and Assembly bypolls.

Singh also sent a strong message to ministerial aspirants who have been making statements and resorting to pressure

tactics. "That is not our culture," he said. "They should discuss such issues only within the party and refrain from making public statements," he stressed.

On the delay in cabinet expansion as the Chief Minister is waiting for the central leaders' approval, Singh said it is the CM's prerogative and it will happen soon.

FULL INTERVIEW | P4

## Consensual interfaith marriage stopped in UP

NAMITA BAJPAI @ Lucknow

A sticking problem in the new law in Uttar Pradesh on interfaith marriages came to the fore on Wednesday as one such ceremony on the outskirts of Lucknow was stopped by the police though the wedding was consensual — not just of the couple but their families too.

Raina Gupta, 22, was to wed Mohammad Asif, 24. While Raina is a Chemistry postgraduate, Asif is a diploma holder in pharmacy. The wedding was being solemnised with the consent of both the families, Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police, South Zone, Suresh Chandra Rawat, agreed.

While the new law mandates applying for permission a month in advance, the couple didn't. The local Hindu Mahasabha unit raked up the issue, but the police decided against booking them as the couple agreed to comply with the law, he said. It is a case of following the law in letter, but not in its spirit.

# HDFC Bank can't issue new credit cards

SESA SEN @ New Delhi

TAKING a grim view of frequent outages reported in HDFC Bank's online services, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has directed the private lender to stop issuing new credit cards and put all its planned digital launches on hold till further orders.

The Mumbai-headquartered bank, India's largest private-sector lender with a market cap of ₹8 lakh crore, has also been asked to examine such lapses at the board level and strengthen its IT infrastructure to restore customer faith in digital banking channels.

Disclosing the RBI order, dated December 2, to exchanges on Thursday, HDFC Bank clarified that the restrictions are limited to new digital launches and that there won't be any impact on existing operations, including credit cards and digital banking.

"We assure our customers there is no reason to worry. You can continue to transact with the bank without any concern," Sashidhar Jagdishan, the newly-appointed MD and CEO of HDFC Bank, said in a letter to customers.

**1.5 crore credit cards**

RBI's move will hurt HDFC Bank as it is the highest issuer of credit cards in India with 1.5 crore cards in force as of September. Digital operations are critical to the bank as 90% of the transactions come from digital channels

The trigger for the RBI action was the major disruption on November 21 due to power failure in the primary data centre, the third such instance in the past two years.

The bank had faced a similar outage on its mobile app in 2018 and again in December 2019 owing to "increasing payday transactional activities".

An RBI team examined the case and asked the bank to bolster its IT infrastructure to keep pace with the explosive growth in digital banking.

Technical glitches aren't limited to HDFC Bank. Hours after RBI cracked the whip on the Mumbai-headquartered bank, State Bank of India's YONO app, too, faced a system outage, forcing SBI to issue an advisory to customers to use internet banking instead. P12

# NOW OR NEVER, SAYS RAJINI; PLANS TO LAUNCH PARTY IN JAN

T MURUGANANDHAM, S KUMARESAN @ Chennai

"IF not now, then never." The tweet sent out at 12.16 pm on Thursday set the social media and political circles in Tamil Nadu on fire. It had come from the official handle of actor Rajinikanth, who had been waiting for the "right time" for over three years now, ever since he announced his decision to enter electoral politics.

A formal announcement would be made on December 31, and the party would be launched in January, the actor said. Soon after the tweets were sent out, Rajinikanth has appointed the former president of BJP State unit's intellectual wing, Ra Arjunamurthy, as the chief coordinator of his party. Thamizharuvi Manian of Gandhiya Makkal Iyakkam, he said, would supervise the works for launching the party.

The sudden announcement has surprised several members of the Rajini Makkal Mandram. Even during the November 29 meeting with senior office-bearers of the Mandram, the actor gave no indication about launching the party, a few members who attended the meeting confirmed to *Express*.

"*Mathuvom — eliaththaiyum maathuvom — ippo illenna eppavumae illai*," he tweeted on Thursday, which loosely translates to, "It's time for change. If not now, then never will it happen." He also said: "If I succeed (in my political venture) it would be the success of the people, and if I fail, it would be the defeat of the people... With the massive support of people, Tamil Nadu will witness the emergence of spiritual politics, characterised by virtues such as honesty, transparency, incorruptibility. Politics that is bereft of caste and communal leanings."

Within an hour of sending out the tweets, the actor met the media at his Poes Garden residence. He clarified that he had taken some time to launch the party due to the Covid situation. P7

*If I succeed(in my political venture) it would be the success of the people, and if I fail, it would be the defeat of the people...* – Rajinikanth

**Party's office bearers are...**

Former president of BJP State unit's intellectual wing, Ra Arjunamurthy, appointed as the chief coordinator of Rajini's party. Thamizharuvi Manian of Gandhiya Makkal Iyakkam would supervise the launching works

## No night curfew for Xmas, New Year, hint ministers

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Udupi/Bengaluru

HOME Minister Basavaraj Bommai on Thursday said the State Government is looking at options other than imposing a 'night curfew' ahead of Christmas and New Year celebrations. Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar concurred that curfew may not be necessary, but questioned the need for any celebrations.

Speaking to reporters in Udupi, Bommai said, "The draft advisory, prepared by the Health Department based on recommendations of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), suggested a night curfew, but we may not opt for it. However, Covid-19 guidelines should be followed during the New Year celebrations," he said.

"Revellers should ensure that no crowds gather. The Health Minister will come up with the guidelines to be followed during the celebrations in the coming days," he said.

On his part, Dr Sudhakar said that enforcement measures will be discussed with experts. "Social distancing will be difficult to maintain as people will congregate in small spaces. We do not know experts' opinion on the second wave in January. Considering all issues, we will discuss what steps can be implemented across the state during Christmas and New Year," he said.

CONTINUED ON: P2

EXPRESS READ

**ED carries out raids against PFI**

New Delhi: The ED on Thursday raided 26 locations in nine states linked to the PFI including those of chairman O M Abdul Salam as part of a "larger" money laundering probe against the organisation.

**Centre increases domestic flights' cap**

New Delhi: The cap on the number of domestic flights that Indian carriers are permitted to operate was increased from 70 per cent to 80 per cent of their pre-Covid levels on Thursday.

WITH THIS ISSUE CITY'S BEST WEEKEND GUIDE INDULGE
30 PAGES, INCLUDING 16 OF INDULGE (TABLOID)

## TERROR GRAFFITI

MANGALURU POLICE ARREST 21-YEAR-OLD YOUTH

The arrested person is a resident of Thirthahalli. Police suspect the involvement of two bike-borne men and three special teams are probing the two cases of provocative graffiti | P7

COSTLY AFFAIR?

# *Soudha shining — ₹59L just for cleaning walls, corridors*

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

THE 'corridors of power' are all set to get a swachh cleanup. Perhaps the state government firmly believes in the old saying – Cleanliness is next to godliness. And what it will cost the government just to get the walls and corridors spick and span is a whopping Rs 59 lakh at least. That too for only seven months. Once this period is over, a fresh tender will be called.

And this at a time when the government is cash-strapped and finding it tough to even pay salaries or fill up the vacant posts, according to government employees.

The Public Works Department as the custodian of Vidhana Soudha called for a tender last month from private

agencies for Rs 59 lakh for seven months. This means the government will be spending around Rs 8 lakh per month for cleaning just the corridors and walls of the Soudha. This is apart from paying the house keeping staff and general maintenance.

Vidhana Soudha which houses the legislature and chambers of ministers has 370 rooms and 14 general toilet complexes within the premises.

The iconic Soudha is constructed using stones. Water jet cleaning has been finalised to spruce it up.

Speaking to The New Indian Express, Guruswamy, president, Karnataka State Secretariat Employees Association, said that they are not objecting as it is an administrative matter.

CONTINUED ON: P7